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AT THE SEASHORE, BY TOYOKUNI

JAPANESE COLOR PRINTS

THE Museum has lately added to its collection of Japanese prints by the purchase of some two hundred new examples.¹ The collection is still small, but it is to be hoped and expected that it will be increased in the future. In the appreciation of most of the art products of the past, Europe has been before us, but in regard to the far East the position is different. It is only in recent years that the best of the potteries, carvings, lacquers, and other works of art of China and Japan have left their native homes; and while we may envy the fine artistic feeling of the French collectors or the learned thoroughness of the Germans, yet on the whole America has taken her share—perhaps as amply in color prints as in anything.

After the works of Fenollosa, of Seidlitz, and of Gookin, it is needless to write again the history of these prints. It may be pointed out, however, that the popular school of art began with paintings, while prints became common only at the end of the seventeenth century. Their development is interesting as showing how a technical method of work, employed by men of exceptional talent, was made to give artistic qualities peculiar to itself and

growing naturally out of its use. There are three periods in this development, each clearly marked and with its own charm. First came the so-called "Primitives." The artists were "primitive" only as being the first to employ wood-engraving, for Japanese art was in full possession of its powers and had even begun to decline when the wood-cuts appeared, but the new process required a new treatment. The cuts were printed in black from a single block. Some were touched up in color by hand, some left plain. Later, about 1742, color blocks in red and green were added to the printing, but the foundation remained the black ink. This black was all the same tone. The "notan" of the Kano painters, in so far as it depended on the variation of the washes of India ink from the palest gray to the deepest dark, was not reproduced. To replace it spot could be contrasted with line, the composition could be carefully balanced, something of the swing of the brush stroke could be given, and, above all, the surfaces could be decorated and varied by patterning. The design remained perfectly flat. There was no attempt at modeling any of the details in relief or arranging the composition in depth, but to adorn the surface all the wealth of invention that had accumulated in Japanese industry and art was resorted to. Light was relieved against dark and

¹A number are shown in Gallery 25, Floor II.

dark against light, simplicity was contrasted with complexity, elaborate floral and naturalistic patterns were placed beside checkerboard or geometric ones. Never before, perhaps, were simple themes so ingeniously elaborated. Fenollosa compares them with the fugues of Bach or

added, the feeling was the same, the simple greens and reds merely making the pattern more subtle. Finally, just as they had reached their highest perfection, a new development took place which promptly drove the "primitives" from popular favor.

In 1765 there began to be published



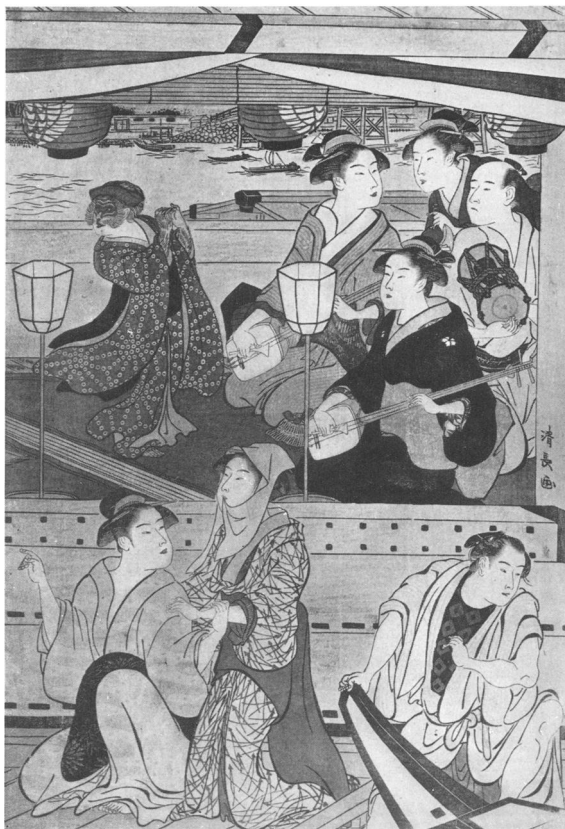
BOATING PARTIES ON THE SUMIDA RIVER
BY KIYONAGA

with Greek architectural ornament. Nothing at all equal to them in this respect has been produced in Europe. Dürer's *Life of the Virgin* or Holbein's *Dance of Death* may have profounder artistic and intellectual qualities, but on the ground of beautiful decoration in black line and spot none of the early German or Italian work shows anything like the skill of the Japanese. Even when the color blocks were

prints of an entirely new type, depending for their charm on their coloring, and for a generation and more the "nishiki-yé", brocade pictures, as they were called, continued in a glorious series. The old training in pattern and line always remained as a foundation even unto the wreck of the school, more perhaps at the end than at the beginning, for none of his followers was so completely a colorist as Harunobu, the

originator of the nishiki-yé. His methods are simple, a mere juxtaposition of flat tints, but within his limits he is unsurpassed for delicacy and originality. Instead of the simple touches of red and green of the old prints, he filled the whole ground with the most delightful tones in novel

degraded caste but the idols of the common people. Harunobu had been too proud to represent them, but later Sharaku drew from their contorted and vulgar faces the strongest studies of character and expression which the school produced. Kiyonaga gave the life of city and country



BOATING PARTIES ON THE SUMIDA RIVER
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and subtle harmonies, which accorded perfectly with his favorite subjects of young girls or boys drawn with a peculiarly tender grace. Neither color nor design could be more charming, but they could be strengthened and varied. On his lines other artists developed innovations, fitting his coloring to their own subjects. Shunsho and his pupils published their interminable series of portraits of actors, a

with a delicacy, a mastery, and a large wholesome vision which give him perhaps the primacy over the others, though Utamaro with his subtle, decadent temperament and Yeishi and Toyokuni at their best are little behind him. In the finest works of these men color printing reaches its highest perfection. In fact, if we did not possess them, we should be justified in saying that such skill would be impossi-

ble. All the countless dexterities of the mixing of the colors, the spreading of them on the block, the printing of them on the paper were done with amazing knowledge and feeling. Like the "primitives" they too pushed their excellences to their ultimate development, but this time there was no new birth to send them phenix-like in another flight and the inspiration slowly died away. The end of the golden

Out of this wreck two men remain who by the strength of their personal genius maintain the honor of the school until the middle of the century when the color prints, good and bad, practically cease. Most different in character and work, it is noteworthy that they both were alike in escaping the monotony and common-placeness of their contemporaries by a constant study of the infinite variety of



DAIMIO ADMIRING THE SEA, BY HOKUSAI
(FROM THE SERIES OF ONE HUNDRED POEMS EXPLAINED BY THE NURSE)

period of the popular school may be put at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Some charming prints were still produced but Kiyonaga had ceased to work, Utamaro was weak and dying, Toyokuni had renounced whatever refinement he had had and was working for the actors, while his countless pupils had neither originality nor feeling. Never were the prints more popular, never were they produced in such quantities or so eagerly bought, but the drawing had become vulgarized and conventionalized while the color had lost the old, rich glow and in spite of the new, gaudy, aniline pigments the general effect was raw and blackish.

nature and life. The older man, Hokusai, was a relic of the earlier time. Born in 1760, he was already a boy of five when the first "nishiki-yé" appeared and he lived far into the decadence, dying in 1849. In spite of his almost ninety years of life and his ceaseless labor it still seems incredible that one brain and one hand should have produced such a boundless mass of work. He copied the styles of all his contemporaries, he copied all the old schools of Japan or China, he retold the old heroic or poetic legends, he reproduced with enthusiasm the common life of the streets, and he knew every shape of beast or bird or tree or mountain down to the

very blades of grass. His works were published in enormous editions and spread everywhere so that he was long considered in Europe as the leading artist of Japan. Time has impaired his old preëminence. During the highest development of the school he produced prints which for beauty of execution and originality yield to none, but his later work becomes mannered and lacks the distinction and refinement of the

sites, some apparently being drawn on the spot. He felt all the infinite variety of nature, not only the place but the season, the time of day, the weather, and marvelously simplified it all so that the blossoms of spring, the snows of winter, the blaze of midday and the deepening twilight, the rain, the mists, and all the shifting appearances of nature, in a land where nature is most changeable, could be rend-



ISHIYAMA AKI NO TSUKI, BY HIROSHIGE

best of the "Ukiyo-yé" masters. It never fails, however, to be personal and no one seeing it can help having a kindly feeling for the warm-hearted, humorous, self-willed "old man crazed with drawing" who first revealed Japanese art to us.

Hiroshige, the second master of this later period, was of an entirely different type. We know little of his personality and his art was not a compound of all the traditions of his race. On the contrary, it was a new thing, an innovation quite as great as Harunobu's but without such wide-reaching effects. He produced a naturalistic landscape largely based on European models. It had no relation to the old, ideal Chinese paintings but was founded on reality, representing particular

ered by the crude colors and hasty methods of his publishers. For with the increased popularity and the enormous production the old, careful, sensitive work of the printers ceased. A mechanical skill remained, the wood-cutting was good, the printing registered wonderfully well when the hand process is taken into consideration, but the colors were raw and few in number and the paper poor. With the works of Harunobu or Kiyonaga, when the editions printed were very small, one may say that every print was a fine impression. Had Hiroshige been equally well served, one can not even imagine to what refinements of landscape-rendering he might have risen. As it is, out of the thousands of copies from his subjects only a few seem

to have been printed with any special care, so that in spite of their number really good Hiroshiges remain rarities.

The prints previously purchased by the Museum were from the Francis Lathrop Collection and were picked examples remarkable for their rarity and quality. Among them were some of the scarcest of the "primitives" and some of the most famous of the middle period, all in beautiful condition. Of Hokusai there were only some half dozen examples, but they were the ones that a collector would desire above all others. Of Hiroshige there was a complete set of the "Kisokaido", one of his best works, unusually well printed. The new accessions supplement these admirably. There are few early examples, but the men of the middle period are well represented. There is a fine series of actor prints of the Shunsho school and characteristic works by the other men, including a dozen or so of the triptychs or three sheet prints which were the highest efforts of the school. The Firefly Catchers of Utamaro is among them, also a fine and rare Kiyonaga, and three or four each by Yeishi and Toyokuni, where these very unequal masters show themselves at their best. Of Hokusai and Hiroshige there are numerous and characteristic examples. Nearly all of the famous series by the former are represented: the Views of Fuji, the Waterfalls, the Bridges, the Hundred Poems told by the Nurse; with enough miscellaneous work to give an idea of the multifarious activity of his later years. The same may be said of Hiroshige, among whose prints are many of fine quality including several of the Omi and Lake Biwa views, early work but unsurpassed later for delicacy and refinement.

Besides these prints in the Museum mention should also be made of the Brinkley Collection, presented to the Public Library some years ago by Mr. Charles Stewart Smith, which includes fine examples of the middle period, especially a series of the very best Utamaros. From these combined collections any one interested may obtain a sufficiently complete idea of the development, qualities, and beauties of Japanese prints, even though New York is

as yet in no position to rival the riches of some of the great public and private collections here and abroad. S. ISHAM.

THE LOCATION OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

MR. JOHN COTTON DANA, in his very suggestive and helpful article which he called "The Gloom of the Museum with Suggestions for Removing It," published in *The New Yorker* for October, 1913, has something to say about the location of museums in relation to their helpfulness to the community in which they are situated; and he argues, rightly enough, for central locations.

Mr. Dana's complaint that more museums are not so located is one with which most people will sympathize, especially those who have found out through experience what Mr. Dana has not discovered, why it is that more museums are not centrally located.

What follows is not intended to be controversial in character, but to show what forty-five years have done to the location of this Museum.

It is generally conceded that ease of access determines largely the attendance at any museum. In Italy, for example, those art collections placed in cities along the beaten track of tourists have an attendance much greater than collections of similar character and nearly if not quite equal value to be found in less accessible towns. The statement proves true also as regards American museums. The location undoubtedly influences the number of visitors; other things being equal, the museum most centrally located will draw the most people. The advisability of a central location for a public museum is therefore evident.

In these paragraphs I hope to prove that the location of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, however remote it may have been in 1880, warrants the designation "central" to-day.

The northward progress of business and of homes in Manhattan is too obvious a fact to need repetition. When the New